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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at the involvement of parents in child care programs from an historical point of view and offers suggestions on how a partnership between parents and programs can be implemented. In response to immigration and economic depression, initial child care programs were focused on the child's potential for development, opportunities for professionals to provide services, and parent education. The focus changed during the Second World War when day care was supported in order to free women for work in war-related industries. Continuing at work in the 50s and 60s, women in several economic strata demanded day care services. The earlier emphasis on parent education was replaced by attempts to increase parent participation in realizing nutritional, developmental and cognitive program goals for low-income children such as Head Start participants. Later, alternate forms of care and programs responsive to changes in the American family were developed and implemented. In concluding sections of the paper, barriers to good parent/caregiver relationships are identified and future directions and recommendations for day care services are provided in the areas of practical philosophy, consumer education, administrative policies and parent/caregiver communication. (Author/RH)

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# DAY CARE AS A RESOURCE TO FAMILIES

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With increasing numbers of women in the work force and with changes in the traditional family's make-up, day care is becoming more and more a partner in the child rearing process. Such a partnership involves shared goals, planned communication and mutual trust between parents and caregivers. Some day care programs achieve this relationship by chance and some by plan. This paper attempts to look at the relationship of parents to child care programs from a historical point of view and to offer suggestions on how a true partnership can be implemented.

## A HISTORY OF DAY CARE

The day care movement in the United States has always grown in the shadow of the much larger movement to promote healthy child growth and development. Many day care leaders acquired their inspiration to serve children from the researchers and educators who pioneered the nursery, kindergarten, and preschools of this country. Similarly day care leaders learned many valuable lessons about working effectively with parents from these same sources. Yet day care emerged as having its own unique role to play in child rearing and family life and has contributed many insights into the variety of role relationships parents seek from the programs which serve their children. To understand the concept of day care as a family support service, it is helpful to review the history of day care and the role of parents.

## IMMIGRATION AND INDUSTRIALIZATION

The first day care centers, which emerged during the late 1800's and continued through World War I, were sponsored by settlement houses and funded by affluent community-minded citizens. The centers were designed for children of the working poor. As a part of the broader settlement house movement, these centers helped to meet a whole range of needs of families coming into cities from Europe or Asia and later from other parts of the United States such as the rural South and Appalachia. Services ranged from providing recreational programs and well-baby clinics to helping families find housing or obtain food, clothing and fuel. Classes were offered in child care, preparation for citizenship, cooking and nutrition, and whatever else was needed to assist in survival. Thus the primary focus of day care was as a social service. At the same time, there was a growing awareness of the potential for development in the young child and the opportunity for a professional role in offering advice and instruction to parents on the task of child rearing. This new found knowledge in child development and parent education was eagerly adopted by most centers.

By the beginning of World War I, however, the growth of such centers had declined because of the decrease in numbers of immigrants to the United States.

## CHILD GROWTH AND PARENT EDUCATION

Parent education for middle class families had a period of growth

and popularity between 1925 and World War II. The establishment of nursery schools at places like Merrill Palmer Institute and Bank Street College and the funding by the Abby Rockerfeller Foundation of Child Development Centers at universities such as Iowa, Minnesota, Stanford, Yale and others in the early 1920's brought new knowledge and interest in the area. The cooperative nursery school movement was another thrust that encouraged the study of child development by parents while their children were having a group experience. It was only at the end of this period, however, that any new day care programs were established. With the advance of the depression, WPA funds were used to establish "nursery" programs in many communities. These programs operated from 9 to 3 and included some working parents, but the real purpose was to provide good nutrition and adequate rest to deprived children while furnishing employment to out-of-work teachers and the new group of professionals from schools of child development and early childhood education. Again the focus of relationships with parents was on parenthood education.

## THE CRISIS OF WAR

Under the Lanham Act, passed in 1941, there began the first large scale use of public funds to support the cost of day care. The principal goal of these expenditures for day care was to permit women to work in war-related industries, thus freeing men for combat. Many of the centers were staffed by teachers trained in the child development and parent education model but the strenuous times made it difficult to reach an ideal in teacher-parent communication. Women worked 10-hour shifts, 6 days a week. Their transportation

to and from work was hampered by gas rationing, household shopping was time consuming, and many women were coping alone because the husband was in the service.

## WORKING WOMEN AS A FACT OF LIFE

After the War, many women returned to a traditional role of homemaker and mother. Yet statistics on female participation in the workforce indicated a gradual but certain increase. What began as a trickle in the 1950's was confirmed as a flood by the late 1960's. In this new group of working women were many from low income families, who continued to need a broader kind of social program such as that provided by the settlement houses. Yet many more were middle and upper income women who sought to further increase their family's standard of living and who were influenced by the growing opportunity for women in professional careers and the supposed satisfactions of working outside the home.

The public funding of day care was discontinued in most communities after World War II. Yet to meet the demand for day care coming from various income levels, many independent day care organizations were established. Some were formed by nonsectarian non-profit groups such as United Way and supported by charitable donations as well as parent fees. A larger number were initiated by church organizations which recognized that they had facilities and some expertise in child care which could be applied to this emerging community need. An additional large thrust came from individuals interested in the care and development

of young children who were willing to offer day care on a fee-for-service basis. They established for-profit day care centers, some of which did make a "profit" but many of which simply provided the individual an opportunity to be with children while earning a very modest income.

The growth of day care services during this time was therefore an individualized kind of movement. Standards and practices were left to direct service staff and organizational sponsors to develop. Many academic institutions and nursery school leaders preferred to continue studying the developmental needs of children and viewed these newly formed institutions, whose tenuous funding made it difficult to hire highly qualified nursery teachers and whose long hours seemed to present less desirable teaching conditions, as low in status. The influx of more highly educated parents as well as the emphasis on purchasing a service at this time had a marked effect on the relationship between parents and day care programs. There was much less emphasis on parent education and a growth in emphasis on a business-like relationship over the services being received by the child.

Yet it was also a period of the first full realization of the uniqueness of day care - family relationships. In individual day care centers, many astute teachers and directors began to recognize that the care of a child for 8 to 10 hours a day was indeed different from the part-day nursery school role. Day care providers were partners in rearing the child and needed to develop a sensitivity to this shared responsibility. They had to learn to discuss with parents issues related to eating,

discipline, naps, toilet habits, care during illnesses and the many other aspects of child rearing which would be carried on by their program and which might involve conflicts in values between parent and day care programs that could be detrimental to the child. Similarly, the day care staff needed to know more about the needs of children of other than the nursery age, since many centers offered to care for infants and school age children.

SOCIAL CHANGE CATALYST

With the passage of the Economic Opportunity Act in 1965 and the establishment of Project Head Start, a new influence on the function of day care emerged. Head Start was designed to improve the functioning of low income children in public schools (and, theoretically, throughout life) by involving them in a preschool program. Attention was given to health services, treatment of problems, nutrition, general child development, and especially the acquisition of cognitive skills. It was recognized early that in order to achieve these goals for children, parents would have to be involved in the process. Furthermore, Head Start was created in a climate of racial unrest and social turmoil, in which the poor and minorities felt that the larger institutions of society were not concerned about meeting their needs.

One of the strategies used both to reach Head Start's objectives with children and to make it possible for low income parents to gain the skill and confidence to reform society was to encourage parent involvement. Parent involvement became a regular component of Project

Head Start programs with its own budget and usually a staff person to assume responsibility. Parents were not merely exposed to parent education but were encouraged or required to volunteer in the classroom, and many were hired as paid teachers in the program. They were encouraged to seek health services for themselves as well as for their children and to take a role in the actual operation of the program. Policy advisory committees made up of a majority of parents were a requirement. Parents were involved in setting policy, hiring staff, preparing the proposal which had to be submitted each year and evaluating the program.

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Parent involvement worked well in Head Start programs, particularly where mothers were not employed outside the home and were available for this intense level of participation. Encouraged by this success, day care advocates included a requirement for parent involvement in the funding standards for day care under Title IV and later Title XX of the Social Security Act. Similarly, when a comprehensive Child Development Bill was proposed in 1971 and again in 1975, the concept of parent involvement and parent control of the management of day care became a "do or die" issue for many of the leading day care political activists.

INCENTIVES TO WORK AND SERVICES TO MULTIPLE PROBLEM FAMILIES

A major expansion of day care occurred in the late 1960's and early 1970's when public funds through Title XX of the Social Security Act were authorized to provide social services including day care for families

experiencing social problems. Currently more than a billion dollars a year is spent on day care from Title XX alone. Underlying this dramatic growth in day care services was a concern on the part of Congress and the country that the welfare system had grown too large. Day care was seen as a vehicle to move AFDC recipients into work training or paid employment and to decrease the welfare caseload. Along with this thrust was a rediscovery of the social service value of day care. Many families needed intensive social services and health services as well as day care. Parents participating in day care provided by Title XX were apt to be single parents, and a high percentage of them were current or former recipients of AFDC. Many were going to work for the first time and were trying to acquire job skills while caring for home and children. Others were physically or mentally ill and could not devote full capacity to their role as parents and homemakers. Day care for families with such serious needs has required various kinds of supplemental resources such as a social worker, health programs and ongoing contact with other social agencies.

To many Title XX parents the day care center has become almost an extended family. Concern for the child's development is shared between staff and parents. Family oriented social activities such as potluck suppers, watermelon cuttings or ice cream socials provide an evening out at little cost for families who do not have much money.

When asked about the kinds of things they would

like to have from the center, parents sometimes express the desire to have activities for themselves as persons not just as parents. Classes in ceramics or sewing or how to be an effective consumer are well attended and enjoyed, and it often happens that the conversation turns to children and parenting. Such activities are usually optional, and not all parents attend.

## CURRENT DAY CARE TRENDS

### RECOGNITION OF ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF CARE

In the past ten years there has been a steadily increasing number of working women in the labor force and a corresponding increase in the need for child care. In addition to the rapid growth of Title XX day care there has also been an increase in day care services for middle class families.

While there have always been some private day care centers for families who could afford the tuition, many middle class families have opted for other arrangements. In-home care was often used and care in the home of a friend or neighbor was a common option. This latter choice was often referred to as baby-sitting but it is now emerging as family day care.

In the past, many professionals saw family day care as a resource to be used when a day care center was not available; and they assumed that it would decrease when there were more centers available. It has now become evident that family day care is the true

preference of many families. One reason that many parents choose family day care is that they prefer to select another family with the same general cultural background and similar values about behavior and discipline. They feel free to request certain eating and sleeping patterns which are compatible with those at home.

Because of this preference for family day care, and because it is a resource that is available in both urban and rural areas, there is a movement to organize homes into systems. Some of these are family day care agencies in which central administrative staff select homes, provide training, place children, and work to assure that the care provided is supportive of good child development.

In other instances providers themselves are forming associations and seeking training, sharing information and equipment, and advocating for family day care. Because of this growing organization, family day care is beginning to receive more attention from professionals in the field and will probably continue to expand and improve.

The other large growth of day care in this decade is that of the emerging day care industry. In cities across the country, day care chains are building new, attractive buildings located conveniently off major expressways between residential areas and places of work. They are attempting to provide good quality services but are caught between rising costs and the amount of tuition that families are able or willing to pay. It is still not completely clear whether the industry will be

able to provide satisfactory care and still make a profit acceptable to investors. At the present time there appears to be a wide range in quality from one center to another.

## CHANGES IN THE AMERICAN FAMILY

In addition to the fact that more women with young children are now in the labor force there have been other changes in the American family. The typical family is no longer a father who earns the living, a mother who is a full-time housekeeper, and two children. Such families make up only 20% of the population. There are many families with single parents -- mothers or fathers --due to the high divorce rate. There are also many couples living together with children and without clear legal status. Furthermore, young families in our mobile society often live far from relatives and from the supports they can provide, especially in emergencies.

In spite of these changes there is still a belief that the family unit should be self-sufficient. In reality all families use some outside supports - schools, health services, recreation, to name a few. These are well accepted. But when mothers look outside for help in child rearing, some critics accuse them of shirking responsibility. These critics are often actually working to prevent the increase of day care.

## BARRIERS TO GOOD PARENT/CAREGIVER RELATIONSHIPS

The heightened interest in the needs of the family has caused many

institutions to reexamine their role in relation to families. Day care programs have begun to realize that certain values and attitudes of staff or parents can constitute a major barrier to an effective working relationship.

Professionals in child development and early childhood educatio often identify so completely with the child that they do not really view the child as a family member. Most of them give intellectual recognition to the importance of the family but at the operational level entertain salvation fantasies. It is quite common to hear a teacher or caregiver say, "If it were not for the families we could do so much more for the children," or "We work so hard with the children and they seem to be making progress, and then they go back into the home and it is all lost." Caregivers do deal with parents who are immature or who have so many burdens and pressures on them that they do not carry out their parental responsibilities as well as might be hoped, but wherever possible the parental role should be supported and reinforced.

Day care providers have to be very much aware of their own values about the family and about the role of the mother as a worker. Many child care workers really believe that all women should be at home with their children, and these feelings can get transmitted consciously or unconsciously. In a sense day care workers have resolved in a unique way the conflict between staying at home and working. They are in paid

employment but are still engaged in a home-oriented task, that of rearing children. Thus it is not surprising that they may be critical of women whose work removes them completely from their children.

Another common barrier is an administrative one. Many programs have a policy that only the director or head teacher may talk with parents. Reasons given are that the direct caregivers are not qualified to do so and might in some way upset the parent, and that there might be a breach of confidentiality. Yet often such supervisory personnel are not available very early or late in the day when parents are bringing or picking up their children.

Parents' perceptions of day care can also pose a barrier. Many parents view the day care program as a "school." Sometimes their own early experiences with the educational system have made them reluctant to question school authorities. In some cases, the parents may feel unqualified to challenge the practice of a supposed expert. In other cases the concern may be that day care staff will not accept criticism well and that it may affect their relationship with the child or the child may be dropped from the program. It may be that some day care programs do react poorly to parental criticism, but generally day care programs are receptive to parental concerns and are willing to respond to them.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Day care at the present time is still attempting to meet nearly

all of the needs that it has addressed historically and to include all of the role relationships. It is true that many of those needs still exist and deserve to be met. However, our understanding of the nature of day care itself requires a different emphasis. Day care in the past was often seen as a solution to a temporary problem that would eventually be solved. In many cases it was designed to meet the needs of a specific economic and social class of parents. Any future definition of day care must recognize that day care has become a permanent support to family life in America and that parents' use of it is not limited to any social or economic group.

Wide differences in the kinds of services that parents need from day care must be recognized. Many families just need a place where their child can be safe, well-cared for and happy during the hours that the parents must be away. They want consistent discipline, stimulating experiences, and positive social relationships for the child just as they would if the child were at home all day. They are interested in periodic parent conferences but do not look to the center for general information about child rearing nor for social contacts. They may well prefer not to be actively involved in the running of the center.

On the other hand, other parents view the day care center as a kind of extended family and will seek advice and reassurance from the staff, will enjoy participating in family-oriented social activities, or will want to participate in activities that enable them to learn new

skills and help them grow as individuals. They may find participation in the administration of the center challenging and fulfilling to their sense of parental responsibilities.

To some degree day care programs can continue to widen their role relationship with parents and maintain a specialized approach. That is, programs oriented toward parent involvement, social services, etc., will continue to operate with this special emphasis. But it is important to define these issues for parents before they enroll their child. At the same time, no matter what the special emphasis of the day care program, there must be a realization that the most appropriate response to a family is an individual one and that the same level of participation should not be expected from each family.

## A GROWTH IN PHILOSOPHY

At the conceptual level, there is a need for a definition of day care which integrates the many previous roles it has played and which accommodates a future that includes a supportive relationship with families and a greater diversity of forms of service and role relationships with parents. Similarly, the day care community must recognize that caregivi and nurturing are important functions. Day care providers need to accept the broader concept of day care as a partner in the child rearing process as well as a program with an early childhood education component. In our society, where more status has been given to education than to caring and nurturing, it has been easy for those in the field to emphasize education. Education in its broadest sense includes total

development, but for many it means learning numbers and letters, colors and shapes -- and much of the planning and in-service training in day care is focused on such activities. We would not argue against an educational thrust in day care, but we would suggest that "education" should be defined broadly and that academic preparation should not be emphasized to the neglect of other activities that contribute to preschool development.

CONSUMER EDUCATION

Parents need to select their child care arrangement thoughtfully. They should remember that they are still in charge of their child's life. Too often selection of a day care plan is not considered far enough in advance. Sometimes this is unavoidable if a return to work is a response to a sudden crisis, but in most cases there is time to plan and to make a thorough exploration of available options. Cost and convenience of location are often primary considerations, and they are realistic constraints. However, they should not be the only criteria.

The development of Information and Referral Services should be encouraged. In this way, parents can be advised about their options and can be given criteria to make good choices and to monitor the plan as it is carried out. Parents also need to know how to file a complaint if the situation warrants. Knowledgeable and concerned parents are the best hope for achieving and maintaining acceptable levels of quality.

ADMINISTRATIVE POLICIES

With the growing appreciation of the importance and complexity of

day care and its relationship to families, it is important that day care programs state clearly their goals and objectives.

It will facilitate successful carrying out of goals if these are written so that they are clearly understood by all concerned, board members, administrative staff, program staff, and parents. Having both written goals and written policies should enable a program to employ people who share a commitment to those goals and policies and to define the in-service training needed for staff to carry them out.

Reexamination of the staffing practices of day care programs is another important administrative issue. Staff must have time assigned to interact with parents. In many current programs the fewest staff members are available in the early morning and late evening. These are the times that parents are readily available and are natural times to share information.

PARENT/CAREGIVER COMMUNICATION

All staff members should be capable of some communication with parents. If they are not able to do that when they join the program, it should be an early part of their training. Workers with negative attitudes toward parents should be counseled early in employment, and this basic problem should be discussed periodically during staff meetings.

All caregivers should be able to articulate the position of the program on such things as guidance and discipline, learning philosophies, simple childhood problems such as thumbsucking, bedwetting,

sibling rivalry, not wanting to go to bed, etc. They should also know their own limitations and should be given help in knowing how to handle situations that are beyond their expertise. Parents who are having serious marital problems, problems with their jobs or in the community, etc., should be encouraged to talk to the director or the social worker if there is one. If the problem cannot be properly handled there, an appropriate referral should be made.

Clearly each day care program must analyze the different kinds of questions parents ask, define which staff members are capable of providing the information, and follow up with appropriate training. But a widening involvement of staff with parents is needed if each individual family is to gain a real support from day care.

## CONCLUSION

There are many things that go into making a good day care program. The staff's commitment to children, knowledge of child development, and ability to carry out a successful program are extremely important. However, we also need to help people develop better interpersonal skills so that they can work successfully not only with children but also with their colleagues and the families they serve. A day care center is very much like a home. Children flourish best when there is harmony among the family members and where communication is open so that problems can be solved. Most of all, there needs to be a mutual commitment and a shared sense of satisfaction when things are going well and empathy when they are not.

This does present a very large challenge for those involved in the provision of day care. However, those people who are truly successful in working with children already have skills that can benefit the children's families, if they genuinely accept this as part of their role.

## Recommended Readings


Community Solutions For Child Care - Report of a Conference
U. S. Department of Labor, Office of the Secretary, Women's Bureau, August, 1979, pp 1-99

The Interface Between Families and Child Care Programs - A Study of Parent-Caregiver Relationships, Douglas Powell, The Merrill-Palmer Institute, 71 East Ferry Avenue, Detroit, Michigan 48202, 1977, pp 1-32

"Defining the Care in Child Care" Social Work, Karen Authier, Volume 24 #6 November, 1979, National Association of Social Workers pp 500-506

Establishing a Family Day Care Agency, Nancy Travis and Joe Perreault, Southern Regional Education Board, 1977, pp 1-27

Minutes-Task Force On Parent-Caregiver Relationships
Unpublished memo - Southern Regional Education Board, Atlanta, Georgia, August, 1976 pp 1-49